

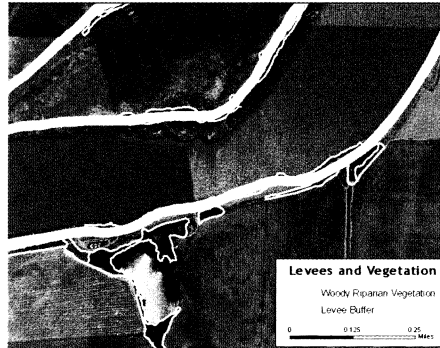
Corps' Plan to Remove Levee Vegetation Violates ESA

The California Delta is a labyrinth of sloughs located roughly between Sacramento in the north and Stockton in the south. It encompasses about 1,000 miles of waterways. Much of the Delta's riparian vegetation is found on levees.

The Army Corps of Engineers has issued a new nationwide policy requiring the removal by local flood control districts of riparian vegetation along levees, which would impact vegetation in the Delta. This could result in the loss of from 25% to over 80% of existing important and rare riparian vegetation types including valley oak, white alder forest, and Mexican elderberry woodland.

The Corps' policy violates the En-

dangered Species Act, which requires that before vegetation can be removed, federal wildlife agencies must be consulted



Example of expected extent of clearing of Delta levees (gray) overlain onto a recent detailed vegetation map to show the effect on channel margin riparian growth (yellow polygons). Map courtesy of Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program, DFG.

on potential impacts to listed species. Vegetation in the Delta is important for listed species such as salmon, steelhead, giant garter snake, and Valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Moreover, as pointed out in a joint document issued by the California Department of Water Resources and Department of Fish and Game, the preponderance of scientific evidence suggests that well-managed levee vegetation poses very little risk to levee integrity, and often reduces the risk of erosion. The removal of trees may actually compromise levee safety.

The Center for Biological Diversity has filed notice of intent to sue the Corps if it implements the new policy, based on impacts to endangered species in California. ❧

In Appreciation: Brad Jenkins

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